

# Vision needed to see the future

MICHELLE HAMMOND

THE establishment of a Pilbara training centre for hospitality and tourism could lead to cruise ships, fishing charters and adventure tours, according to the Port Hedland Progress Association.

PHPA member Jan Ford said the vacant block of land next to Jan Ford Real Estate, in King-smill Street, would be developed to create the Pilbara Centre for Excellence in Tourism and Hospitality.

Ms Ford said a Pilbara-wide training centre, specific to these industries, would create a more skilled workforce, which would attract developers.

"(With) every social impact assessment survey that we've had since I arrived in town in 1998, accommodation has always been top on the list, followed by education and health," Ms Ford said.

"But then what people want is a café.

"They say, if I could go into town and have a cup of coffee and have a nice meal, it would just help me deal with everything else.

"It's the easiest thing to fix. Accommodation is expensive – we're looking at a million dollars a house. It's tough.

"To have a cup of coffee is a \$4 investment that makes a difference to our week.

"The problem we have at the moment is that we don't have enough cafes because we don't have enough staff to be able to work in those cafes.

"So if we could build a centre to provide training in the hospitality industry, then that helps our own town."

Ms Ford said the training centre would include accommodation, and that strengthening the Pilbara's hospitality industry would open up the region as a tourist destination.

Mark Olive, a Melbourne-based celebrity chef who met with Ms Ford in Port Hedland two weeks ago, said the Pilbara, and Port Hedland in particular, had huge potential as a tourism hotspot.

Mr Olive said the port could



PHPA members Mark Olive and Jan Ford look to the future.

accommodate cruise ships and fishing charters, which would attract tourists and retain residents.

"You could organise tours to Karijini (National Park), Tom Price and Marble Bar — the hottest place in Australia," Mr Olive said.

He said more could be done to promote Port Hedland as having the biggest port in Australia and home to one of the world's leading producers of iron ore, BHP Billiton.

Ms Ford said with regard to all development, it was important the Pilbara progressed as a whole.

"The reason why the South West region — around Bunbury,

Margaret River and Busselton — has become so popular is because they eventually saw themselves as a region and not as individual towns competing against each other," she said.

Ms Ford said the same cohesiveness was needed between Port Hedland and Karratha.

"We need Karratha as much as we need water to the desert... we can't have one big city that's popular with nowhere else to go from it.

"December 2009 was when our Premier stood up publicly and said we will have twin cities in the Pilbara.

"It's now up to the people to make that commitment."

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